



MORTON COLLEGE

COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT NO.527

Minutes for the Special Board Meeting/Board Retreat

Saturday, November 22, 2025

**Approved**

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**1. Call to Order**

The Special Board Meeting/Board Retreat was called to order by Board Chair, Leonard Cannata at 9:36 AM on Saturday, November 22, 2025, at The Westin Michigan Avenue in Huron A – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 909 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60611.

**2. Roll Call**

**Present:**

Leonard Cannata, Trustee  
Jose Collazo, Trustee  
Susan Grazzini, Trustee  
Charles Hernandez, Trustee  
Anthony Martinucci, Trustee  
Oscar Montiel, Trustee  
Frances F. Reitz, Trustee  
Eliana Ruiz, Student Trustee (arrived at 10:32 a.m.)

**Also Present:**

Dr. Keith D. McLaughlin, President

**3. Citizen Comments**

None

**4. General Discussion and Planning**

- 4.1 Year-in-Review
- 4.2 Strategic Plan
- 4.3 Board Goals
- 4.4 Training
- 4.5 State and Federal Legislation
- 4.6 Current Landscape of Higher Education
- 4.7 Campus Ancillary Services
- 4.8 HLC Update

Dr. McLaughlin provided opening remarks and expressed appreciation to the Board for their continued service, guidance, and commitment to Morton College. He shared that the purpose of the retreat was to reflect on the previous year's accomplishments and discuss priorities for the coming year.

## Year-in-Review Highlights

Dr. McLaughlin provided an overview of significant accomplishments from the past year:

### 1. 100th Anniversary Celebration

- The College successfully concluded its 100th anniversary events, including the gala and commencement ceremony.
- Trustees participated, and the events provided strong visibility and community engagement.

### 2. Trustee Training

- All trustees are currently up to date with required training units.

### 3. Collective Bargaining Agreements

- Two new CBAs were approved this year:
  - Full-Time Faculty
  - Classified Staff
- Negotiations proceeded smoothly and were mutually satisfactory.
- Adjunct faculty negotiations remain unresolved; discussions have stalled for nearly two years.

### 4. Community College Leadership Doctoral Program Partnership

- Morton College established a statewide cohort partnership with Kansas State University to support doctoral-level leadership development in the community college system.
- Provost Sheldon Walcher is leading coordination efforts.

### 5. Resolution of Legal Matters

- Two long-standing legal issues were successfully resolved.

### 6. Campus Improvements

- Significant progress continues on perimeter improvement projects:
  - Brickwork is complete.
  - Concrete work near the gymnasium is underway.
  - Installation of new flagpoles and spring landscaping are planned.
  - Infrastructure for new signage and a digital billboard at the corner entrance has been installed.
- Trustees noted the improved nighttime lighting and visibility around campus.

### 7. Gymnasium Elevator Project

- The elevator project continues to experience substantial delays.
- The Capital Development Board (CDB) removed the original contractor and has not yet secured a replacement.
- Morton College and Cornerstone are applying pressure for progress; delays impact community programs using the facility.
- Trustees expressed ongoing frustration with the CDB process, which also affects institutions statewide.

## 8. Athletic Enhancements

- New batting cages were added to the baseball and softball fields.

## 9. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System

- The Board approved implementation of a new AI-enhanced CRM system to improve student engagement and streamline communication.
- The system will support personalized interactions and outreach while enabling staff to focus on high-touch student support.

## 10. Senior Leadership Changes

- The President reviewed recent leadership transitions, noting these decisions are significant and made with careful deliberation to support institutional progress.
- The Board expressed confidence in the President's judgment.

## 11. Academic Program Accreditation

- The Nursing and PTA programs successfully returned to good standing after previous challenges.

## 12. Government Relations

- The College has strengthened relationships with local and state elected officials, supported by ongoing work with Cornerstone Government Affairs.
- Trustees expressed appreciation for improved communication and responsiveness.

General discussion continued around institutional priorities, change management, and leadership practices.

## **Strategic Plan**

Dr. McLaughlin provided an overview of key strategic goals within the college's strategic plan:

### 1. Learning Environment

- Commitment to creating optimal in-person, online, and hybrid learning environments.
- Continued focus on expanding and renovating campus facilities.
- Emphasis on developing new and revitalized academic programs aligned with future job markets.

### 2. Leadership and Professional Development

- Expanding staff and faculty capacity to better serve students.
- Strengthening partnerships with external organizations to enhance educational opportunities.

## **HLC Update**

- The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) removed the college from "notice" in November, following recommendations from the visiting team and the Institutional Excellence Council.
- Dr. McLaughlin expressed confidence in the 2027 reaffirmation visit, a comprehensive ten-year review.
- A preparation team, led by the Vice President's office, has already been working for two years.
- Trustees discussed past challenges with accreditation and expressed appreciation for the

leadership that helped restore the college's standing.

#### **Campus History & 50-Year Celebration**

- The college recently celebrated its 100-year anniversary, and this year marks 50 years of the current campus.
- Plans to incorporate archival campus construction photos and history into upcoming events, including the grand opening of the new perimeter space in the spring.
- Trustees shared memories and stories about the early years of the campus and community history.

#### **Campus Memorabilia & Museum Discussion**

- Trustees discussed the former campus museum and the community's interest in viewing historical memorabilia.
- Items are currently in storage; administration is exploring potential locations for display.

#### **Athletics & Academic Facility Updates**

- Recognition of the athletics program's progress, including the volleyball team's strongest performance since 1981.
- Completion of major renovations to a biology lab, with another lab renovation beginning soon.
- Faculty played a significant role in designing upgraded science facilities.

#### **National & State-Level Engagement**

- Dr. McLaughlin now serves as Chair of the National Alliance of Colleges, helping raise the institution's national profile.
- Continued participation in the Illinois Community College Council of Presidents and recent retreat activities.

#### **Financial Status**

- The college remains in strong financial condition.
- Expenses have been managed conservatively.
- Investments continue in technology infrastructure to support long-term institutional needs.

#### **Chief Information Officer Search**

- A national search resulted in two finalists.
- Open forums were held for faculty and staff.
- A recommendation will be presented to the Board at the December meeting.

A brief recess was taken after which the board reconvened to continue the discussion of items outlined.

#### **Early Retirement Incentive**

Dr. McLaughlin reported that the College recently introduced an early retirement incentive, and five employees have already indicated they will participate. The deadline for participation in this academic year is mid-December, with retirements occurring at the end of June or August, depending on summer teaching assignments.

The College also received a positive five-year reaffirmation of recognition from the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), similar to the HLC process but at the state level.

#### **Leadership Training - Police**

Dr. McLaughlin shared that the College is in discussions with Northwestern University's Center for Public Safety to potentially host leadership training for police chiefs and other law enforcement leaders. This partnership would align the College with a highly respected national program. Cybersecurity training needs were also discussed, and coordination may occur with the new CIO.

#### **Grants**

Dr. McLaughlin highlighted that the College secured over \$3 million in competitive grants this year, including funding for CTE, Pathways, automotive EV technology instruction, adult literacy, dual credit, mental health supports, and early childhood education capital improvements.

#### **5. Closed Session**

Approval to adjourn to Closed Session meeting for discussion under 5ILCS 120 Section 2(11) "to consider when an action against, affecting or on behalf of the particular public body has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the public body finds that an action is probable or imminent."

Trustee Reitz made a motion to go into a Closed Session at 11:06 a.m.

Trustee Collazo seconded the motion.

Ayes: Trustees, Cannata, Collazo, Grazzini, Hernandez, Martinucci, Montiel, Reitz, and Ruiz

Nays: None

Motion Carried

Trustee Grazzini made a motion to go back into Open Session at 11:27 a.m.

Trustee Martinucci seconded the motion.

Ayes: Trustees, Cannata, Collazo, Grazzini, Hernandez, Martinucci, Montiel, Reitz, and Ruiz

Nays: None

Motion Carried

#### **General Discussion Continued.**

#### **Campus Ancillary Services**

Dr. McLaughlin provided an update regarding ongoing conversations with the current food service provider, Paisans. He reported that he met with the owner for an extended discussion about food service operations, student preferences, and potential facility improvements.

The provider expressed interest in surveying students to better understand desired food and beverage options. As part of the discussion, preliminary ideas were shared related to possible renovations to refresh the dining space and create a more modern, café-style environment. Dr. McLaughlin noted that the College may consider supporting certain renovation costs since the space is College-owned. He requested feedback from the Board on whether he may continue discussions and begin exploring design concepts, potential costs, and shared responsibilities.

Dr. McLaughlin also noted that Paisans has been expanding its business, including developing a food truck and hiring a CFO to support operational improvements. The College and provider discussed opportunities to enhance catering services, improve menu options, and support student needs—particularly for evening students and commuter populations. Student Trustee Eliana expressed that the current hours and options are insufficient for students who remain on campus into the evening.

Board members asked clarifying questions regarding the current agreement.

Dr. McLaughlin explained that:

- The College does not charge rent and does not receive a percentage of sales.
- There is no guaranteed annual payment to the vendor.
- Year-to-date catering expenditures total approximately \$40,000, which are tied to college events and not guaranteed revenue for the provider.
- Future agreements may include expectations such as exclusive catering rights or other negotiated terms.

Discussion continued regarding hours of operation, the need for additional vending options, and the cost of maintaining Farmer's Fridge machines, which require College subsidy due to low volume. Trustees emphasized the importance of ensuring affordable options for students and improving access during evenings and weekends.

Members also discussed the need to consider other institutions' models for coffee shops or expanded food service. There was consensus that Paisans has provided consistent service to the College and improved offerings compared to previous vendors.

Trustee Hernandez raised concerns regarding a food truck that had recently been asked to leave College property during a baseball doubleheader. Dr. McLaughlin stated he was unaware of the incident and agreed to follow up regarding licensing and policy requirements for allowing food trucks at athletic events. Additional considerations related to health department regulations and insurance requirements for outside vendors were noted.

Dr. McLaughlin concluded by reiterating that food service improvements remain a priority, and further information will be brought back to the Board as discussions progress.

## **6. Adjournment**

Trustee Martinucci made a motion to adjourn the Regular Board Meeting at 12:04 p.m.

Trustee Collazo seconded the motion.

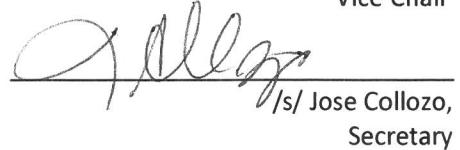
Ayes: Trustees, Cannata, Collazo, Grazzini, Hernandez, Martinucci, Montiel, Reitz, and Ruiz

Nays: None

Motion Carried



/s/ Anthony Martinucci,  
Vice Chair



/s/ Jose Collozo,  
Secretary